

Is God Forgetful!

Ps 100; Ex 22³-31⁰; Heb 13¹-15

Imitate their faith. [Hebrews 13⁷]

I remember one of the first times that I had been invited to preach - I must have been about 14 years old (how important it is to nurture enthusiasm). I wanted to say something about the text **I will never leave you nor forsake you** but had forgotten that we would have to read the bit about the **marriage bed** and **fornicators and adulterers** that wasn't entirely appropriate for the old peoples' home we were in! I haven't made that mistake again!

The passage from Exodus seems to suggest that God was a bit forgetful for it says that, after the cries of the Hebrews, **he remembered his covenant**. Is God forgetful? Does he need to be reminded of things he promised?

You know that the answer is no! It is a rhetorical motif in the writing. The contrast that we have in all the readings is between God's faithfulness and our faithlessness:

On the one hand:

God's faithfulness permeates every aspect of the Exodus reading:

- ✦ The key thing to notice in the opening of Exodus is not God's remembering, but the **covenant** (this *heed* is repeated in the Psalm). **God took notice of them** is a wonderful way of saying they had made it to the top of the priority list.
- ✦ Moses had been prepared as a Hebrew member of the royal household, so he knew his way around the court, which was why God commissions this hesitant, stammering man.
- ✦ It is the collection of the verbs: **I am the God of your father(s); I have observed the misery of my people; I have heard their cry; I know their sufferings; I have come down to deliver them;** leading to **I will send you to Pharaoh.**

It is also evident in the sermon that is the book of Hebrews:

- ✦ There is that bold statement that was at the heart of my adolescent preaching (more from theory than than experience - but proven true in time) - **I will never leave you or forsake you.**

- ✦ There is the constantly of God as we know him in Christ - **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.**

God is faithful and can be trusted - he doesn't forget us!

On the other:

The story of the Exodus shows that the Hebrews wanted the oppression to end, but they didn't necessarily want to leave Egypt: they complain their way into the Exodus and, despite God's evident deliverance in pillar and cloud and miracles, then tried to replace God with a cow and ended up wandering round for 40 years and only the next generation experienced the fulfilment of God's promise.

Hebrews also points at the way faithlessness takes hold of us:

- ✦ They have to be reminded that **love** is practical - it has to be **hospitable; marriage** isn't respected; people seek assurance from **money** and not from God.
- ✦ **Leaders** are being ignored rather than **imitated; strange teaching** is obviously more attractive than orthodoxy; **regulations** (in this instance about food) replace the experience of **grace**.
- ✦ The focus is in the present - where we have **no lasting** city - and not **looking for the city that is to come** that means learning to live now in a way that means we will fit in then.

Last Sunday evening I preached a sermon in response to the New Atheists at the Cathedral. When we were done she-who-must-be said to me, 'I thought you would tell the story about the atheist you met in the Church (Inn).' He declared himself an atheist and I simply responded to him by saying, 'The main difference between us is that, when things go wrong, you don't have anyone to blame!'

But neither does he have anyone to depend on - because God's faithfulness is never affected by our faithlessness! When we forget to be Christians, God doesn't forget to be God!